



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY NEWS RELEASE

Department of Toxic Substances Control

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California Hospitals Receive Award for Mercury Elimination

SACRAMENTO --- "The elimination of mercury from our environment is a goal that all industries and households should aspire to. The State of California would like to have mercury free or "virtual elimination" within hospitals by January 2005. Virtual elimination means the elimination and proper disposal of mercury containing products and replacement with products that are mercury free".

"I am pleased to participate in a program that encourages and honors California hospitals who achieve the goal of virtual elimination of mercury from their operations," said Ed Lowry Director of the State's Department of Toxic Substances Control.

Lowry's comments were made during the quarterly meeting of Sutter Health hazardous material officers. During the meeting, held on September 5th, 2003, the Mercury (Hg) Elimination Leadership Program (HELP) awards ceremony honored over a dozen Sutter California hospitals for achieving the goal of virtual elimination of mercury.

Through the program, Sutter Health has reduced their level of mercury system-wide by 75%. In some Sutter hospitals they have achieved a 98% elimination of mercury products.

"Reaching the goals, in regards to the reduction of mercury products is a great contribution to protecting the environment and puts Sutter Health in the forefront of pollution prevention," said Lowry.

"HELP" is a joint effort of the DTSC, the Department of Health Services, the United States Environmental Protection Agency Region IX, Hospitals for a Healthy Environment, and the California Healthcare Association. Recipients of the commendations were:

- Eden Medical Center, Castro Valley – Ray Fischbach
- Memorial Medical Center, Modesto – Dan Sharver

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- Mills Peninsula Health Services, Burlingame – Gail Lee
- Novato Community Hospital, Novato – Tom Spotts
- Sutter Auburn Faith Hospital, Auburn – Geff Triano
- Sutter Coast Hospital, Crescent City – Kymmy Nicol
- Sutter Davis Hospital, Davis – Ray Heroux
- Sutter Delta Medical Center, Antioch – Frank Salinas
- Sutter General Hospital, Sacramento – Gloria Hurd
- Sutter Lakeside Hospital, Lakeport – Tracy Gleason and James Huston
- Sutter Memorial Hospital, Sacramento – Gloria Hurd
- Sutter Roseville Medical Center, Roseville – Ron Thompson
- Sutter Solano Medical Center, Vallejo – Ralph Tresca

Virtual elimination of mercury by these hospitals means they completed all of the following:

1. Inventoried all mercury devices and sources
2. Replaced, at a minimum, 75 percent of sphygmomanometers, clinical mercury containing devices, laboratory chemicals containing mercury, and mercury laboratory thermometers. They also prepared a plan for total elimination of the remaining devices
3. Replaced patient mercury thermometers with non-mercury containing devices
4. Developed and implemented a fluorescent tube recycling program
5. Developed and implemented a mercury and alkaline battery collection program
6. Prepared and put into practice an Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) Statement that bans the purchase of mercury containing items without prior approval

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Mercury can adversely affect reproductive function and the nervous system. When hospitals throw away mercury-containing devices such as fever thermometers, blood pressure measuring devices, and other mercury-containing products, mercury can reenter the environment through gases released by landfills and through leaching into the groundwater. Many publicly owned treatment works are now requiring hospitals to meet strict wastewater treatment discharge limits for mercury. When mercury-containing waste is incinerated, the mercury is vaporized into the air. According to the U.S. EPA, medical waste incinerators are the fourth largest source of mercury going into the environment. Mercury fever thermometers alone contribute about 17 tons of mercury to solid waste landfills annually.

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The Department of Toxic Substances Control's mission is to restore, protect, and enhance the environment and ensure public health, environmental quality and economic vitality by regulating hazardous waste, conducting and overseeing cleanups, and developing and promoting pollution prevention.

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"The energy challenge facing California is real. Every Californian needs to take immediate action to reduce energy consumption. For a list of simple ways you can reduce demand and cut your energy costs, see our Web-site at www.dtsc.ca.gov."